

HOW TO... Compare Word documents

Do you need to track changes in two versions of the same document? You can use Word's Compare tool to see those changes at a glance, as Simon Edwards explains

There are plenty of complicated ways to collaborate on documents, but sometimes the simplest methods are the best. Typing some text into Word and sending it to someone else to edit is a reliable way of handling essays, reports and other important documents that need to be checked by more than one pair of eyes. However, when the original author gets back an edited version of their work, they may struggle to see the changes the editor has made. This is particularly true for long pieces of work.

Sometimes it's important to see what changes an editor has made to ensure they have not introduced factual errors, or even to see what mistakes they have corrected. You may even find that your work was so good the editor made no changes at all. Microsoft Word has a built-in feature that lets you compare two documents, highlighting any changes that have been made, whether they are deleted words and paragraphs or additional text. This makes it easy to see where an editor has made revisions. You can even reject them if you wish.

All versions of Microsoft Word developed in the past 10 years have a document comparison feature. When you're comparing two documents, as we are here, they all work in roughly the same way. We've used Word 2007 in our example.

1 Open Word and choose the Review menu option. On the right-hand side you should see a button labelled Compare. Click this button and two further options, Compare... and Combine..., will appear. The latter option is useful for taking two sets of revisions and combining them into a single document, but if

you simply want to see the changes that have been made, then choose Compare...

The Compare Documents window will open. Click the top-right drop-down menu, and either select the name of the original document from the list of recently used documents or choose Browse... to find the one you want. Use the top-right drop-down menu in the same way to choose the revised document. You can enter a name or code into the 'Label changes with' box to make it clear who edited the revised version. Click OK.

2 The left part of the screen shows a summary that describes how many edits have been made. In this example, 10 pieces of text have been added and seven removed. No text has been moved or reformatted. The actual changes are listed below this summary, along with the name of the editor we added in Step 1.

On the right of the screen, you can see the document with any changes highlighted. Added text appears underlined, while removed text is struck through with a single line. A vertical black line in the left margin also indicates lines where changes have been made.

3 Word's document comparison view also shows the original and edited versions of the document alongside the 'compared' document. As you scroll through the compared version, the others scroll automatically.

In this example, the main document shows that a paragraph has been added by Tom H between one that ends, "they did not know why" and another that begins with, "When the end of

the recital was reached". This paragraph is clearly absent from the original document, which appears in the top-right pane.

4 Unless you have a large monitor, viewing the original and edited documents at once is going to make your desktop a little cramped. It can also be distracting. You can remove them from view by clicking on the Show Source Documents button and click Hide Source Documents. If you prefer to see just the unedited original, click Show Original.

5 You can change how the summary on the left looks by clicking the Reviewing Pane button. Choose Reviewing Pane Horizontal to make the list of changes appear across the bottom of the screen, or hide it by clicking Reviewing Pane Vertical. If you've already made it horizontal, you'll need to click the horizontal option again to hide the list.

6 You may want to continue editing the document and keep track of any changes you make. Click the Track Changes button to highlight any further edits you make. Choose the Track Changes option from the menu that pops up and start typing. New words appear in red and underlined, while deleted text remains in view but with a line through it. A vertical black line appears in the margin to highlight changes.

You can change the appearance of edited text by clicking the Track Changes button again and selecting the option to Change Tracking Options. Save the compared document to keep a record of all the changes. **CS**

